

Procedures for Protecting the Interests of Students and Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) during 'Exceptional Events'

1 Principles

This procedure explains the actions to be taken by the University of Manchester when an exceptional event happens which disrupts the normal academic processes and procedures.

An exceptional event is an event which has 'the potential to have a detrimental impact on academic standards and/ or the student experience' and will be determined by the President and Vice-Chancellor. It could include, but is not limited to:

- An epidemic or pandemic
- The loss of buildings (such as library, halls of residence, teaching buildings)
- Industrial action and/or action short of a strike
- Anything else that is likely to have a significant effect on student/PGR examinations, progression, assessment and marking.

The common feature is that students/PGRs are prevented from completing required progression and/or assessment processes, as a result of serious interruptions to the University's business and through no fault of our own within the normal timescales, in line with our academic regulations.

The procedure is based on two key commitments, the first to our students/PGRs and the second to ensure cooperation with all staff across the University community. In this respect, the University will:

- 1.1 Ensure that there exists a culture of mutual trust, based on our shared values about the nature and purposes of higher learning.
- 1.2 Respect the integrity and professionalism of all our staff, expecting that members of staff will continue to undertake their normal responsibilities and duties as employees, although individual staff members may judge that the issues prompting industrial action override their obligations to a current cohort of students during such action.
- 1.3 Take all steps to protect the rights and interests of our students during any 'Exceptional Events'. In particular, we will do our best to allow students on undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research programmes to continue their programme of study, in the standard timeframe, as far as possible.
- 1.4 Operate on the basis that '*the University at an institutional level has an absolute obligation to safeguard the interests of all its students/PGRs*'.

2. Actions

The University will put in place the following arrangements.

- 2.1 The President and Vice-Chancellor will activate this procedure during an exceptional incident at the request of either the Vice-President for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience or the Associate Vice-President (Research).
- 2.2 A *University Examination Board* (UEB) will be set up with overall authority and responsibility for all assessment and examination processes across the University. In

particular, the UEB will have the authority to agree student grades in situations where the relevant procedures or parts of them have, in the judgement of the President and Vice-Chancellor, become unworkable. The UEB will also have authority to agree all other matters relating to the progression of and award or non-award of degrees and other distinctions to students/PGRs.

- 2.3 The University Examination Board (UEB) will have the following members:
- President and Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair)
 - Deputy President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor
 - Vice-Presidents and Deans of Faculties
 - The Vice-Presidents with policy responsibilities for Teaching, Learning and Students and Research
 - Two professorial members of Senate to be nominated by the President and Vice-Chancellor
 - One Faculty representative, per Faculty, drawn from the elected membership of Senate.
 - At least one External Examiner
 - Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer or nominee (Secretary)

The Board will also be able to invite other members as necessary. Attendance can be via video conferencing, audio or in person.

- 2.4 Where *'Exceptional Events'* prevent a student/PGR from starting or finishing any final examination or other assessment, it is agreed that this should be viewed as "other sufficient cause" as allowed under Paragraph 3 of Ordinance XXXVIII. It is also agreed that these circumstances are a valid reason for changing the assessment of individual students/PGRs as allowed under Paragraph 9 of General Regulation XII.

- 2.5 The UEB will be allowed to agree changes or amendments to the arrangements for examination, assessment, progression and award or non-award of degrees and other distinctions, as follows, so long as none of the changes or amendments disadvantage students:

- The Undergraduate Degree Regulations,
- The Postgraduate Degree Regulations (for the Degree of Master, Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate)
- The Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations
- Regulations for individual degree programmes, including higher degrees, and any other Regulations as appropriate.

- 2.6 The UEB will ensure that:

- (i) A final result/outcome is agreed for each student/PGR for that academic year, and
- (ii) The status of each student/PGR in relation to progression and, where appropriate, the award or non-award of degrees or other distinctions is agreed in time to meet all commitments to students/PGRs relating to assessment, progression and graduation.

- 2.7 In committing to the principle that no student is disadvantaged, the UEB will ensure at all times that the integrity of the assessment and examination processes is maintained and that results in that academic year are comparable with results in other years.

- 2.8 *Faculty Examination Boards* (FEBs) will be set up for each of the Faculties with overall authority and responsibility for all assessment and examination processes within the Schools in that Faculty. In particular, the FEB will have the authority to agree student grades and classification for that academic year, and to agree all other matters relating to student/PGR progression and award or non-award of degrees, as well as other distinctions.
- 2.9 The Faculty Examination Board (FEB) will have the following members:
- Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty (in the Chair) (or nominee)
 - All Heads of School (or nominee) within the Faculty
 - The Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research
 - The Faculty Vice-Dean for Teaching and Learning
 - The Faculty lead for Graduate Education
 - At least one External Examiner
 - The Director of Faculty Operations or nominee (Secretary)

The Board will also be able to invite other members as necessary. Attendance can be via video conferencing, audio or in person.

- 2.10 Each Faculty Examination Board will provide the University Examination Board with a final decision for all students/PGRs in its Faculty, within an agreed timeframe together, where relevant, with recommendations about the progression and the award or non-award of degrees or other distinctions. If this information is not available within the agreed timeframe, the Head of School will be required to provide the information to the UEB.
- 2.11 Faculty Examination Boards and the University Examination Board will operate under the agreed framework given to Boards of Examiners under General Regulation XII for assessing the form and content of examination papers, together with the authority to agree students' results.
- 2.12 A University wide 'No Disadvantage' Policy may be considered appropriate depending on the timing of the disruption in the academic year. A recommendation would be made by the Teaching and Learning Strategy Group and/or Manchester Doctoral College Strategy Group to Senate, if it was felt appropriate.

3. Alternative Assessment Arrangements if the interruption to delivery is for a prolonged time

- 3.1 The programme team can identify alternative assessment arrangements¹ for students providing the following principles are applied:
- The alternative assessment can show that the learning outcomes for the unit have been achieved.
 - No student will be disadvantaged by the change of assessment and all assessment must be inclusive, taking into account access to resources for all learners. Schools will conduct an equality impact assessment on the alternative assessments.
 - A review will be undertaken for all students with Learner Support Statements to ensure their needs are met.

¹ Which may need to be discussed with PSRBs as appropriate

- Alternative assessment may normally be undertaken remotely.
- No campus-based examinations will be held unless this is an explicit requirement of the PSRB. Examinations will only be held in order to satisfy these requirements at a time that is deemed safe and appropriate. This may result in a delay to progression and award decision-making.

During exceptional times, the priority is to provide certainty to students and staff, therefore External Examiners will not normally be involved in decision making on alternative assessments. However, details will be provided to External Examiners by the programme team.

- 3.2 Where alternative assessments cannot be offered within a reasonable timeframe, the work of final year students will be reviewed by the Faculty Examination Board to agree whether the programme learning outcomes have been achieved.
- 3.3 The Director of Teaching and Learning (or similar) will oversee the coordination and preparation of all alternative assessment arrangements for their programme. These will be reviewed and approved by the relevant Faculty Vice-Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students.
- 3.4 The Manchester Doctoral College Strategy Group may identify alternative/remote arrangements for formal PGR annual/continuation reviews and viva examinations providing the following principles are applied:
 - No PGR will be disadvantaged by the arrangements; if necessary assessors/examiners must take into account any PGR disabilities/special needs prior to undertaking the review/assessment.
 - Progression reviews take any disruption into account and can be regarded as an opportunity for providing formative feedback rather than a summative judgement on the PGR's progress.
 - All participants of remote viva examinations have recorded their agreement to proceed; appointment of an independent chair is strongly advised.

4. Raising concerns

- 4.1 Students/PGRs are entitled to raise concerns as a result of 'Exceptional Events' through the normal [complaints and appeals](#) channels: However, they would not be entitled to appeal on the grounds of procedural irregularity based solely on the operation of this procedure.
- 4.2 When investigating complaints resulting from '*Exceptional Events*', consideration should be given to how alternatives to the cancelled learning opportunities were delivered, particularly in the context of the individual student's specific learning needs.

5. Refunds and Compensation

- 5.1 The University will not offer a refund of tuition fees, unless an investigation of a formal complaint finds that a suitable alternative to cancelled learning opportunities has not been delivered.
- 5.2 This procedure should be read with reference to the Student Protection Plan and the Policy on Refunds and Compensation.

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